



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Douglas Davidson

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Douglas Davidson to the Permanent Council, and wishes to thank him for his comprehensive and thorough report. We greatly value his commitment to leading the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and congratulate him for assuming this important responsibility only a few months ago.

We also highly appreciate the work of the Mission's entire staff, including those in the field offices, and their tireless contributions in supporting the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to enhance stability and peace in the republic.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a remarkable example for post-conflict reconstruction, and the United States commends the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina for its significant achievements so far. We highly appreciate the Government's steadfast determination to move forward towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

The OSCE Mission deserves much credit for facilitating and supporting that success. Critical strides have been made toward property return and restitution. The rule of law has been strengthened. This has resulted in a complete overhaul of the criminal justice system. We note with enthusiasm the Mission's significant role in monitoring and reporting on domestic war crimes cases. Progress can also be recorded when it comes to reform of local government. Reform of defense structures and military intelligence, in which the Mission has played a key role, are also noteworthy.

The United States is very pleased with the close cooperation and coordination between the Mission and other actors of the International Community, especially our European partners.

A number of challenges remain, none of which are insurmountable. Allow me to highlight some of these challenges and problems. First, while opposition parties have scored significant gains in the October municipal elections, the big three ethnic-based parties continued to carry those elections. This pattern suggests that many voters still remain committed to vote solely within their ethnic community lines. Also, public apathy and a reported lack of interaction and trust between citizens and politicians remains an obstacle in moving toward a truly representative government.

Second, the United States remains concerned over human trafficking in Bosnia and Herzegovina and throughout the region. The Government's ongoing efforts to implement and update its National Action Plan are critical in fighting trafficking, supporting effective prosecutions, and protecting witnesses. Much progress has been made in combating trafficking in Bosnia, and we were pleased to see that Bosnia and Herzegovina was placed on Tier Two of the United States 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report issued last June. Much work remains, however, and we look forward to more progress toward combating corruption, the bribery system, and black marketing. These practices remain widespread, and they demand an immediate and long-term response.

On fulfillment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's human dimension commitments, let us emphasize that the United States would like to see more steadfast progress toward ending the exclusion of, and discrimination against, Roma. Roma children must have access to education.

Moreover, the fate of over 300,000 internally displaced persons and the 100,000 Bosnian citizens living as refugees in neighboring countries must still be tackled. This is the only way to bring closure to a human ordeal that remains a legacy of the war.

Bosnia and Herzegovina must also invest in its youth by providing them with economic opportunities. For, only if young people stay, can the emergence of a new generation of citizens and of leaders be ensured.

Finally, let me reiterate our serious concern over continued non-cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). This has also been the subject of a recent speech by High Representative Ashdown. The Republika Srpska has not apprehended a single fugitive indictee, in violation of the Dayton Peace Accords and other international obligations. Republika Srpska authorities and criminal networks are holding its citizens back from economic development, prosperity and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The chance to enter into Partnership for Peace is being lost. The Republika Srpska must immediately apprehend those indicted by The Hague Tribunal, including Radovan Karadzic.

We are committed to assuring that justice is rendered to all those who became victims of past abuses. We also reiterate the need to ensure full compliance with international human rights standards. Therefore we wish to express our concern over the recent beating of a Bosnian Serb journalist, Todor Micic, whose reporting on a non-nationalist Bosnia has made him the target of Croatian and Serbian nationalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States has great confidence in the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina to overcome these obstacles and meet these challenges directly and wholeheartedly. We are prepared to assist in any way we can.

In closing, let me thank Ambassador Davidson, and through him, the entire staff of the Mission for their professional and personal commitment to the many programs that improve the lives of people in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.